

House Republican Press Release

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**REP. HARKINS PARTICIPATES IN INFORMATIONAL FORUM
ON LOCAL SCHOOL FUNDING**



*Bridgeport Meeting Allows Local Input On
Controversial System*

Hartford—On Tuesday, April 4, State Representative John Harkins, R-Stratford, took part in an informational forum regarding state funding of local education at Bassick High School in Bridgeport. The Legislature's Education Committee hosted the forum, which focused on state's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula and additional ways the state could improve school funding. Tuesday's forum was one of six held at locations throughout Connecticut. Additional forums were scheduled in Ansonia, Hartford, Ledyard, Meriden and Stamford.

The forum centered on two bills currently before the General Assembly, House Bill 5562 and Senate Bill 434, that would revise the education funding system for municipalities.

The ECS formula has been the primary distribution system for education funding since the state Supreme Court's Horton vs. Meskill decision in the 1970s. Since being put in place, the state legislature has changed it every year, often in ways that have increased the share of education aid provided to the state's big cities and shortchanged some suburban and rural communities, said Rep. Harkins.

“Stratford has always received increased state funding even under the current capped formula, said Rep. Harkins, participated as a panelist with Education Committee members. “Stratford has never technically lost money because you can't lose money you never received. A change in the ECS formula could adjust current funding levels either up or down, and we have to ensure that we receive our fair share of funding and that it helps relieve the local taxpayer burden.

In fact, according to the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), the basic ECS formula is simple. The number of students in each school district (weighted for educational need) is multiplied by the amount the state has determined a district should spend to provide an adequate education (the foundation) and by an aid percentage determined by the district's wealth. The result is the district's ECS grant.

However, within this apparent simplicity is a host of complicated philosophical and financial issues. In addition the constant revisions to the formula have added constraints and caveats that prevent it from operating in its pure form. While the ECS formula was scheduled to be phased in over four years starting in 1989, the Legislature began to change the formula, mostly to reduce its fiscal impact, even before it took effect. The formula was substantially revised in 1995 and has been changed every session since then.

“The town of Stratford is committed toward educating our children,” said Rep. Harkins. “I fully support the efforts of the local community and will continue fighting to make sure the town is not shortchanged by any changes made to the funding formula. We need a balanced appropriation of education dollars statewide that will address the education of all children equally. The School Finance Task Force appointed by the Governor is meeting regularly to craft comprehensive reform that would take into account the ECS formula, magnet, charter, and vocational schools, and special education costs. I have also been personally meeting with members of the task force to ensure that all communities like Stratford receive their fair share of funding. The task force is hoping to have this final comprehensive plan by January 2007.”